

In the Wake of Trauma: Tips for College Students

Whether or not you were directly affected by a traumatic event, it is normal to feel anxious about your own safety, to picture the event in your own mind, and to wonder how you would react in an emergency. People react in different ways to trauma. Some may become irritable or depressed, others lose sleep or have nightmares, and others may deny their feelings or simply “blank out” the troubling event. There is no right or wrong way to feel after experiencing trauma.

While it may feel better to pretend the event did not happen, in the long run, it is best to be honest about your feelings and to allow yourself to acknowledge the sense of loss and uncertainty. It is important to realize that while things may seem off balance for a while, your life will return to normal. It is important to talk with someone about your sorrow, anger, and other emotions, even though it may be difficult to get started.

You may feel most comfortable talking about your feelings with a professor, counselor, or religious or spiritual leader. The important thing is to share your feelings with someone you trust. If you don't have someone in whom to confide, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) for someone who will listen.

It is common to be angry at people who have caused great pain. This desire comes from your outrage for the innocent victims. One must understand, though, that it is futile to respond with more violence. Nothing good is accomplished by hateful language or actions.

While you will always remember the event, the painful feelings will decrease over time, and you will come to understand that in learning to cope with tragedy, you have become stronger, more adaptable, and more self-reliant.

Tips for Coping

- **Talk about it.** Talking with friends, classmates, professors, and family members will help you realize that you are not alone in your feelings.
- **Limit media viewing.** Take breaks from watching news coverage of the event.
- **Take care of yourself.** Taking good physical care of yourself with rest, exercise, and healthy eating will help your body to deal with stress. Do activities that you enjoy and find relaxing.
- **Avoid excess.** Avoid using alcohol, drugs, and tobacco products as a way of dealing with stress.
- **Resume routines.** Getting back to your daily routines in life can be a good method for regaining a sense of control.
- **Get involved.** Engaging in positive activities like group discussions and candlelight vigils can help promote comfort and healing.

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